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Rural and Farm Crime in Dyfed-Powys

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Publication date:
2020

Citation for published version (APA):

Morris, W., & Norris, G. (2020). *Rural and Farm Crime in Dyfed-Powys: Second Report*. Prifysgol Aberystwyth | Aberystwyth University.

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Rural and Farm Crime in Dyfed-Powys:

Second Report (February 2020)



Heddlu Police
**DYFED
POWYS**



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DYFED-POWYS
POLICE AND CRIME
COMMISSIONER

Acknowledgements

This report was supported by funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys. The authors would also like to thank Dyfed-Powys Police and particularly the Rural Crime Team/Forum for. We are grateful to colleagues at Aberystwyth University, including Alexandra Brookes for assistance with online survey and to Dafydd Davies from the Digital and Print Publications Team for assistance with compiling this report.

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Dr Wyn Morris graduated from Aberystwyth University in 2001 with a BSc in Rural Resource Management, specialising in business and economics. His career took him to the Farm Assurance Livestock Scheme where he worked as Certification and Assessment Coordinator while studying for an MSc Econ in Entrepreneurship through the medium of Welsh. Wyn joined Aberystwyth University staff as an Investigational Officer with the Farm Business Survey in 2003, before taking up a post as a Teaching Fellow in Management at the School of Business and Management in 2010. Wyn has been a Lecturer in Management since 2014.

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the policing of rural and farm crime in the Dyfed-Powys area, using information gathered from a survey conducted in the middle of 2019. The work builds on the knowledge from a previous evaluation undertaken on farm and rural crime in the summer of 2017. Key aims relating to this follow-up report are the assessment of change in perceptions of rural policing over the two-year period and evaluations of interventions introduced as a result of the Dyfed-Powys Police Rural Crime Strategy 2017. Survey responses were collected from farmers and rural communities in rural West-Wales through agricultural shows and online through the DPP website.



The implications of this research propose that there has been a marked increase in the reporting of crime and also the general perception of crime levels. Rather than indicating increased levels of actual criminal events, rather it is likely that the investment in rural policing teams and social media have contributed to a shift in culture regarding interaction with the police. Social media and the visibility associated with having dedicated rural crime officers have alleviated some of the concerns raised in the 2017 survey; in addition, trust and satisfaction have shown marked improvements across the force area.

The report makes some recommendations going forward, namely that the investment in these activities was seen as overwhelmingly positive by communities and they were keen to see this continue. However, the perceived success in prosecuting criminals was less obvious and there needed to be greater emphasis on how offenders were dealt with to assure that real impact was being realised and the subsequent deterrent effect visible to criminal enterprises wanting to operate in the DPP force area.

Background

The purpose of this research is to add to the growing evidence base around the extent, effects and responses to farm business crime and the related issue of rural crime more generally. Specifically, it aims to examine how farm crime is perceived by those exposed to it (predominantly farmers), and how they view police response to these crimes, alongside wider issues of trust and police legitimacy.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) publishes a summary report annually on Rural Crime Statistics. Problems with establishing accurate estimates of rural crime continue to exist due to the majority of crime recorded on farms being generally grouped under commercial victimisation (specific rules exist for classifying property usage on farms), meaning estimates remain equivocal (Laub, 1983; Donnermeyer and Barclay, 2005). For example, some crime may be recorded under 'other theft' such as the trade in scrap metal, including farm gates and machinery (Coombes, Wong, Charlton & Atkins, 1994), which are all areas which are classified as farm-based crimes (Barclay, 2016). Similar patterns emerge for other crime categories, including criminal damage and vehicle theft, although some police forces gather micro level data and occasionally publish extensive crime prevention advice (Gilling and Pierpoint, 1999).

In general, what is a specifically agricultural crime (farm based) and how it is measured, and recorded is both varied and problematic (Barclay, 2016). Other initiatives, such as the National Rural Crime Network, are semi-official organisations funded by individual police forces, the Home Office and private companies, with the aim of getting greater recognition of farm and rural crime generally. The driving aim of the government and private organisations is to address farm and rural crime through increased reporting and to generate more robust statistics to support evidence-based policing in this area.



Survey Methodology and Sample

To analyse the broad areas of interest, a cross-sectional survey of farmers and rural residents was utilised. The questionnaire was based on previously used instruments (i.e. Rural Crime Survey 2017), to allow for comparative interpretation of the various measures and potential changes over time.



The specific measures around crime and policing were based upon those from the CSEW, whereas measures of social capital were based upon those from the European Social Survey and the UK Citizenship Survey. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the rural police team to adequately capture both policy and operational aspects of their work in rural contexts. In addition to gathering data on farm and rural crime the research analyses changes since the initial research data collection in 2017. A further stage is undertaken in evaluating the impact of the Dyfed-Powys Police Rural Crime Strategy and associated interventions.

Whilst the study is focused on rural crime more generally, the survey was predominantly answered by farmers; approximately 37% of these being beef and sheep enterprises and a further 31% sheep only farmers and is broadly representative of the upland pastoral systems within the DPP forces region. The findings also include responses from a range of additional stakeholders (approx. 1/3 of sample) from within wider rural areas which in addition to farmers include, pigs, horses and poultry enterprises, contractors and rural residents. The survey was conducted during July-August 2019 through an online platform advertised through DPP social media and at agricultural shows and events attended by DPP.

Key Findings

The total number of respondents experiencing a criminal event at their property was 51% - a similar statistic to that recorded in the previous survey in 2017. Again, as reported in the previous survey farm machinery losses was the largest category of crime (51%) followed by livestock theft (29%) and comparable with national figures from NFU (2018).

Police Perceptions

- ▶ Do you feel that farm crime was on the increase? **98% YES**
- ▶ Were you happy with the way the incident was dealt with by the police? **85% YES**
- ▶ Did the incident lead to a conviction? **75% NO**

One issue facing the increase police attention on rural and farm crime is undoubtedly that more people will report crime; although this ultimately leads to a year-on-year increase in crime statistics for this category, these headline figures only tell part of the story. In fact, one outcome of the introduction of the Rural Crime Strategy was that following the interventions introduced 79% of respondents agreed they now find it easier to contact Dyfed Powys Police on farm and rural crime issues. More importantly, 70% agreed that the introduction of dedicated rural crime officers has increased their trust in the police and 80% that the development of rural crime forums with key stakeholders (NFU, FUW, NRW, etc.) is a positive way of combating rural crime.

A section of the survey evaluated the Dyfed-Powys Police Rural Crime Strategy and interventions introduced by the force. A positive response of 64% felt that farm and rural crime was taken more seriously since the introduction of the rural crime strategy. 54% reported that the dedicated rural officers had increased their trust in the police and 66% of respondents stated that they are more likely to report a crime due to the rural officers.



Rural Crime Strategy - Comparative Data for 2017-2019

The main purpose of the 2019 survey was to re-evaluate the interventions which had been implemented since the 2017 survey, principally through the Rural Crime Strategy (2017) and also through developments filtered down from the Rural Crime Forum.

Around 85% of crimes experienced were reported to the police, but this was below the 91% recorded in the previous study. However, 60% of respondents who reported crimes were happy with the way police had dealt with the incident was dealt with, showing an increase in satisfaction from 55% back in 2017. Hence, although marginally fewer crimes were being reported the manner in which the police had dealt with these incidents was more positive.

Issues around the investigation, gathering of evidence and the wider legal system persist with 75% reporting that the incident did not lead to a conviction. However, this was an improvement from 82% previously and shows that some inroads had been made in dealing with often complex investigations. Recent high-profile cases such as the use of DNA testing on stolen cattle highlight this increased commitment (DPP, 2020).

An area of potential concern was that 83% of respondents reporting awareness of crimes being committed on farms in the local area. This was up from 70%; additionally, 97% felt that crime was on the rise as opposed to 89% in 2017. However, significant changes in crime statistics can sometimes be more of a reflection on reporting trends, and as people become more aware of certain crimes then increases may simply reflect these changing values, i.e. crime statistics may show short-term increases due to greater reporting (Baumer and Lauritsen, 2010). It appears that the increased awareness – through investment in areas such as rural officer and social media – have made crime more salient, but there is no evidence for a general increase in actual criminal events.

Satisfaction with the police

► **52%** up from **47%**

Increase satisfaction in investment in technology

► **50%** up from **33%**

In relation to greater awareness of farm and rural crime, 69% felt that social media was partly responsible increasing this awareness. The use of social media can be linked to live events, for example, stolen quad bikes or suspicious vehicles, and it was found that 80% were now taking preventative measure due to the increased awareness of such activity. Finally, the establishment of rural crime forums – following the 2017 Rural Crime Strategy and led by the police – was seen as a positive step forward by 66% of respondents.

Recommendations

In the two years since the initial survey was conducted, there have been some significant changes in the policing landscape in the DPP force area. Investment in rural policing following the Rural Crime Strategy in 2017 has ultimately increased satisfaction, trust and communication with the police. A by-product of this improved interaction is that both perceptions and reporting of crime have increased; however, these are expected given the relatively low baseline and indeed demonstrate the positive impact that the rural policing team have had since 2017.

Recommendations from the survey respondents include:

- ▶ Keep investing in rural crime officers
- ▶ More prosecutions - deterrent effect that rural crime would be investigated and prosecuted
- ▶ Keeping the same officers within the area
- ▶ Publish summaries of all reported crimes
- ▶ Increase awareness of impact of rural crime on communities and people feeling vulnerable
- ▶ More farm watch signs required
- ▶ CPS need to take rural crime more seriously

The overriding theme of the respondent's comments concerned the lack of prosecutions; clearly building up the expertise and resources necessary to address the complex nature of modern criminal enterprise is the next step in addressing rural and farm crime.





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